

Analysis of Traumatic Narrative Style in Movies—Take *Manchester By the Sea* as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Manchester by the sea was directed by Kenneth Lonergan. The film tells a sad and dramatic story through a tragic but calm narrative. The film was released in 2016 and was nominated for the 89th Academy Awards. This is not only the success of small-cost movies, but also the success of the director's narrative creativity of *Manchester by the sea*. The film uses camera language to portray characters with distinctive personalities, interprets the perspective of the bystander, describes space elements, and presents the audience a real life film, allowing the audience to truly feel the painful struggle of life from the protagonist. The director uses some elements to create a sad atmosphere in this film. In this paper, the author analyzes these elements of this film, in order to provide a new way of narration for the filmmakers in the future.

Keywords: *Tragic movies, narrative style, traumatic movie, traumatic narrative style*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a theoretical term, "trauma" can be used in both pathology and psychoanalysis. Traumatic experience can not only come from major disasters caused by force beyond human control, such as earthquake and tsunami, but also come from wars, conflicts, group riots, terrorist attacks, cult activities etc. Because of the "individual uniqueness" of the trauma source, the post-traumatic stress disorder is not conducive to be understood by other people, and can not be recognized by the "standard meaning" in the society. There is no cure or relief. *Manchester by the sea* is a small budget independent feature film directed by Kenneth Ronald Reagan, which won the best of the 89th Academy Awards of Original script, best actor. *Manchester by the sea* is one of the most representative works expressing individual mental trauma in the history of film art. The plot of this film is very simple but the director uses some simple elements to heighten the atmosphere of sadness [1].

2. ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE

As an audio-visual art, the essence of film is to tell a story for the audience through the combination of image and sound. Most of the time, image expression plays a leading role, as an auxiliary means of narration, sound effect can effectively set off the expressive tension of image language. *Manchester by the sea* is more reserved in the expression of image language. Starting from the Lee's being trapped by a series of ordinary trivial matters, the film uses rich lens to show the complexity and boredom of his daily work, and uses image language to show the hero's introversion and uninhibited.

2.1. The Color and Lens Shaping of Sad Atmosphere

Compared with literary works, the advantage of film lies in that it can transform the words in literal into visible through audiovisual language. The film shows the activities of specific individuals, and then uses color to show the difference between the time and space before and after. The color of the clothes in the movie is obviously different. At present, Lee's clothes are mainly blue, black and gray, with his indifferent expressionless face. Flashback to the life before his house was on fire, he was wearing an orange sleeve coat, a dark red sweater, a yellow T-shirt, even the pajamas were red, even the walls of the house were colorful, full of love everywhere in warm colors, but now life formed a sharp contrast.

Color is the combination of Lee's emotion and thought. Director expresses the protagonist's emotion through color, which makes color not only have narrative function, but have rich emotion. The context in films lay the general tone for film narration and define the emotional atmosphere. In the film, the context is defined by selecting the dominant hue. The use of the dominant hue appears repeatedly in the film, which can potentially attract the attention of the audience and help the audience understand the plot. *Manchester by the sea* mainly uses blue color throughout the film. It regards depression and melancholy as a unique sentiment of Manchester, the beautiful small city. The blue depression and silence are hidden in it, giving the character specific connotation. Manchester, where always snows, is particularly sad in the cold winter. The lonely sea, blue represents the reality of life.

There are two camera stands in the film, which are fixed stands and moving shooting. Many directors deliberately explore and study the film aesthetics of "anti motion" from

the opposite angle, so as to produce the effect of static braking. The movement is set off by stillness to express the monotony and numbness of life, and the character's personality and destiny are described with the stable and calm conflicts in the hearts of ordinary people.

In this film, the stability of the picture makes the whole film look more real, and the picture is stable without agitation, which can better express loneliness and indifference. In addition, there is no subjective lens in this film, and the third angle of view can not reach the inner heart of the characters. In the film, the audience's feeling of not being close to the characters can be increased by the lack of psychological distance from the audience.

2.2. The Interlaced Narrative Technique of Flashback

Manchester by the sea uses the artistic technique of stream of consciousness in its narration, which means it switches time and space through the protagonist's uninterrupted psychological activities, and expounds the theme of the text in a purely subjective frame. The narration of this stream of consciousness is more like solving a riddle, inserting the past memory into the current scene. In the narration of the past, the director chose to jump directly without too much bedding, which was the flashback memory: Lee drove back to Manchester, saw the familiar houses and trees through the window, flashed back to the picture of blowing on the boat. When Lee and his lawyer talked about the custody of his nephew, he flashed back to the scene of his family. Each flashback is an inner exploration, unable to extricate himself from the shackles of the past, and can only be trapped in the abyss of space and time, wandering for a long time, without extricating himself. The strong contrast between the past and the present, as well as the contrast between warmth and misery, are showing loss and helplessness. He has a small social circle of his own, but now Lee is in a different situation. He muddles all the time. As gray as a dead heart, he occasionally gets angry and hits people, hesitates in the face of invitation from his nephew's friend's mother, and finally refuses. Even in the face of other people's active communication, he also shows a kind of indifference. What kind of sorrow and pain this is [2].

In the memory of the past, the color of the picture is vivid, and the background music can also make people feel the existence of warmth. However, the current real life is a simple and poor life. The cold and dark picture performance and the constantly interspersed flashback narration make the comparison between the past and the present clearer and give people a heart touch. Trauma has got the best interpretation. Everything including scenery have become the emotional expression of the protagonist's heart. In this aspect, the technique of stream of consciousness in the film is undoubtedly excellent. It is beyond the traditional narrative, and does not follow the cause and effect, only following the heart. There is no time line as the past can not be defined, and tells people that

Lee never lives in the present. His spirit and body stayed in the frozen time and space in the past, like a drowning man, and could not escape. The wound brought by the fire to Lee was huge and could not be cured. The wound was rooted in his heart and tortured him all the time. Even the warmth of the outside world could not reach his heart and could not melt his mental pain. Of course, there are many wonderful things in these flashback images. Lee and his nephew were playing with each other closely on the boat, and Lee and his wife loved each other. These subtle and unforgettable memories deeply fettered Lee. He sank in the time and space of sadness and joy, and circled in the vortex of warmth and pain [3].

2.3. Other Elements in the Film

2.3.1. Nightmares

In the movie, Lee experienced repeated traumatic nightmares. Because Lee's brother listed Lee as the guardian of his nephew in his will, when Lee talked with the lawyer, the traumatic memory emerged: it burned due to his negligence. After losing his house, his three children were unfortunately killed. This trauma continues to return to reality in the form of nightmare.

The nightmare of children catching fire in the movie blending the past and the present, making the protagonist Lee repeatedly immersed in trauma, but the continuous flashback of the film's traumatic narrative is more like a kind of alert and healing, trying Let Lee accept death while moving towards a new life.

2.3.2. Natural scenery

The film continues to pay attention to the natural scenery. The imagery of blizzard, lone boat, cold rain, ocean waves, gull crowing and lone travel shows to the audience the coldness and impermanence of fate [5].

At the beginning of the film, the scene of Lee laughing and joking with his nephew on a ship in the blue water and blue sky was quickly replaced by the scene of heavy snow. The phone rang to inform his brother's sudden death. The film quickly flashed back to the scene of brother's illness. The doctor informed the family and patients that this would occur irregularly and could not be treated effectively. On the verge of death, apart from shock and incomprehension, people show a deep sense of helplessness and sadness. Death, as a part of destiny, always appears in its irresistible appearance, which is unacceptable and constantly evaded.

The image of Blizzard appears many times in the film. Snow implies the ruthlessness and coldness of nature. People can only choose to endure and wait. The scene of Lee shoveling snow alone appears three times in the film. Snow is the extension of Lee's inner space. If snow is the nature's will, Lee would use his own power to fight against

the force of nature, against fate and death, then followed the news of his brother's death which declare his failure of the struggling. Through the function of covering, snow covers all sins, mistakes, stupidity and pain, but Lee refused to bury the past and wounds. He refused the covering and new memories. This is a life of trauma. The scene of shoveling snow is constantly interrupted by the scene of Lee taking out the garbage. The picture of throwing garbage is meaningful: Lee is throwing away the "garbage" in life for others. This is also the attitude of ordinary people towards trauma-forgetting, driving away and abandoning, but Lee chooses to treasure, keeps and faces it directly, even if the wound was still a red, bleeding one.

2.4. Multi Line Narration and Anti Traditional Ending

The film uses a large part of the content to elaborate the communication between Lee and his nephew Patrick. Although they are related by blood, they show a similar strangeness. Lee lost his dear child and brother, while Patrick lost his father. In the description of the two characters, the film builds two different threads. Lee wants to give up Patrick's custody, but Patrick, on the contrary, is used to living in Manchester. Strictly speaking, Lee is not a good uncle, he indulges himself and Patrick, he thinks that he has no ability or qualification to educate Patrick. Therefore they took different paths [4].

In addition to the two of them, there is a third line, that is, Randy, Lee's ex-wife. After suffering from grief, Randy chose to start again. She married a gentle man, gave birth to a new life, and actively contacted Lee, hoping to attend his brother's funeral. Later, when she met Lee on the street, she choked out her inner thoughts: "no matter what, My heart has been broken and will never heal. "But Lee always evades the problem and does not want to face it. Even in the face of his ex-wife's invitation to dinner, he refused. It is not difficult to guess from their conversation that Randy once said very vicious words to Lee. She regretted for this and blamed herself for the pain he had carried. They made their own choice at the fork of life path. Lee chose to face , Patrick chose to miss, and Randy chose to forget. For them, this might be the best ending.

Not all stories will have a happy ending. *Manchester by the sea* is never a warm story. The audience can not see the hero's optimistic new life or the melting of grief in the film. What they can see is a man with a broken heart who bears everything in silence and is constantly fleeing. Therefore, this film is an anti traditional ending. It shows a kind of sadness and sadness that most people do not want to see, but the reality may be just like this, always mixed with helplessness and heartache. Such a small person's true sadness and joy could deeply move the audience.

3. DISCUSSION

Lee is not good at expressing his feelings as a man. The reason why he is not good at communication is that he does not want others to sympathize with him. Besides the movie, people in real life are also like this. We can not help but admit that the pain of life and death is not a kind of pain that can be forgotten. It will travel with time and appear in every moments in your life. The story of *Manchester by the sea* by Kenneth is very real. Unlike other tragic films, this film is originally sad without obvious conflict, and it pays more attention to detail description. This film, directed by Kenneth, analyzes the reality of life and has no clear definition of right or wrong. Everyone wants to put down the sadness in life, forget it and put down the past. Some people choose to fight head-on, resist fiercely, others choose to accept it silently, since they can not defeat the pain they will continue to live with it. *Manchester by the sea* chooses the latter, which is more similar to and closer to the real life of "us" and seeks the truth in life. Kenneth describes the story according to the original way of life that life is to face the pain of unavoidable death, and complete life always needs to experience. This film allows the audience to face life with a peaceful mind, feel the sadness in it, and think about and feel their own life. As this film is slow, it will give the audience time to experience life.

In most tragic films, there will be some happy moments or a glimmer of hope, but this is totally sad, which also provides new ideas for the narrative style of tragic films in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

In telling the tragic story, the director brings a very realistic experience to *Manchester by the sea* through his unique audio-visual language, which makes the atmosphere of sadness linger for a long time. The protagonist experiences a heavy psychological blow, but he is neither saved nor destroyed. It is no longer important for Lee to return to Manchester. His struggle and efforts are enough to prove his love for life. In his heart, Manchester is no longer only snow and blue sea. The haze of winter is gradually dispersed, and the warmth of spring will come.

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